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Southern African Migration Project

Transnationalism and African Immigration to South Africa

Migration Policy Brief No. 9

Series Editors: Jonathan Crush and Vincent Williams

Editorial Note:

This policy brief by Jonathan Crush and David McDonald is a modified version of the Introduction to their book, Transnationalism and New African Immigration to South Africa (Toronto: Canadian Association of African Studies, 2002). More information on the book is available at: <http://www.queensu.ca/samp/books/book8.htm>

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The demise of formal apartheid has created new and as yet only partially understood opportunities for migration to South Africa. Legal migration from other Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries, for example, has increased almost ten-fold since 1990 to over four million visitors per year. South Africa's (re)insertion into the global economy has brought new streams of legal and undocumented migrants from outside the SADC region and new ethnic constellations within. The easing of legal and unauthorized entry to South Africa has made the country a new destination for African asylum-seekers, long-distance traders, entrepreneurs, students and professionals (Bouillon 1996; Saasa 1996; Rogerson 1997; de la Hunt 1998; Peberdy and Crush 1998; Ramphele 1999).
- 1.2 SAMP¹ aims to explore the migration phenomenon from a variety of disciplinary and methodological perspectives and at a number of different spatial scales. At one end of the research spectrum are the project's statistically representative, quantitative, national surveys in source and host countries (Sechaba Consultants 1997; de Vletter 1998; Frayne and Pendleton 1998; McDonald et al 1998, 1999; Mattes et al 1999; McDonald 2000). These surveys have provided important baseline data on cross-border migration at a pan-regional scale. They have also helped to contest the crude misrepresentations of xenophobic discourse (Croucher 1998; McDonald et al 1998; Crush 1999a).
- 1.3 But the large sample sizes and structured questionnaire instruments necessarily sacrifice the more nuanced information that can only be gleaned from local case studies of an ethnographic, participatory and place-based nature. What is the qualitative nature of the new South African migratory mosaic? Who are the new international migrants and immigrants in South Africa? What are the conditions shaping their migratory patterns? And what is the nature of their relations with South Africans and their home countries?
- 1.4 We are also interested in some of the broader conceptual and theoretical questions prompted by these movements. While they may be relatively new to South Africa (and that itself is an issue for debate), they are not altogether new movements. The global "age of migration" has, by virtue of the sequestering effect of apartheid, come late to the country (Castles and Miller 1993; Cohen 1995; Sassen 1999). The conceptual and analytical debates that have swirled around the issue of migration and globalization elsewhere have largely by-passed South Africa. The question, therefore, is whether the tools for understanding the age of migration have any explanatory purchase on the South African empirical material. Whether South and Southern Africa can actually be a source of theorizing, as they have been in the past, is another question.
- 1.5 Three major themes are addressed in this paper: (a) the changing character of cross-border migration to South Africa; (b) the value of the conceptual apparatus of transnationalism to describe and research changing forms of cross-border migration into

South Africa; and (c) the spatial reconfiguration and emergence of new migrant spaces in the country. Each of these themes is discussed briefly below.

2.0 New Movements

- 2.1 South Africa has a deep history and sizable scholarship on internal and cross-border migration (Jeeves 1995; Rogerson 1995; Crush 1995, 2000). There is a justifiable temptation, therefore, to treat claims of newness with some scepticism. Even the anti-immigrant impulse of South Africa's first-ever democratic state is strongly reminiscent of its undemocratic predecessors (Peberdy 1998, 1999). While there is a strong argument for historical continuity, we do need to be cognizant of the emergence of new local, regional and global forces which are driving new forms of mobility and cross-border migration to South Africa.
- 2.2 One of the most notable post-apartheid shifts is the sheer volume and diversity of human traffic now crossing South Africa's borders. South Africa is increasingly host to a truly pan-African and global constituency of legal and undocumented migrants. They are picked up in all the relevant transactional data sets: in Statistics South Africa tourism and entry statistics, in Home Affairs visa overstay and deportation data, in United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) refugee figures, and regularly in SAMP and other sample surveys (Reitzes 1997; Isserow et al 1998; McDonald et al 1999). Migrants interviewed for the research reported here emanate from east, west and north Africa, as well as the more traditional Southern African sources of Lesotho and Mozambique.
- 2.3 The very idea that South Africa has "traditional" sources of migrants is rooted in the long history of regional contract migration (Crush et al 1991). But tradition, as we know, is regularly reinvented. It is clear that traditional forms of migration are being reconfigured and that new forms of migrant linkage are emerging with traditional neighbours. The numbers are burgeoning even as the purposes diversify. We can point here to several emergent trends.
- 2.4 As the South African economy "rationalizes" to compete in a global economy, it has shed hundreds of thousands of jobs. Formal unemployment rates are staggeringly high yet foreign migrants are undeterred (Standing et al 1996). In construction, agriculture, services and other unionized sectors, employers openly articulate their need and preference for non-South African labour (Rogerson 1999; Crush et al 2000). Interviews with Mozambican deportees show surprisingly high rates of participation in the South African labour market (Covane et al 1998). Migrants from further afield also appear to have few problems obtaining work in cities such as Durban. As Brij Maharaj and Vadi Moodley show in their paper, however, few of these migrants are able to access jobs that are commensurate with their skills and qualifications.
- 2.5 Although the mine contract labour system seems as entrenched as ever, thousands of migrant labourers have been sent home in the last decade. The gold mining industry has

shed more than 50% of its workforce since 1987; two South Africans have lost their jobs for every one foreign miner. The inevitable result is that the mine workforce is once again undergoing a process of creeping “externalization.” Retrenched miners have three options: to sit home and wait, to take the undocumented route back to South Africa, or to sign on with sub-contractors. Gold mines are now hiring back retrenched Mozambican and Lesotho miners to work short contracts with few (if any) benefits, little security and meagre pay. As a large pool of unemployed mine workers with special skills and few job alternatives, foreign workers generally present an attractive option to mine sub-contractors (Crush et al 1999).

- 2.6 Another new trend of note is the gendered reconfiguration of “traditional” migrant streams. Women are making up a growing proportion of the African migrant population crossing into South Africa – particularly from neighbouring countries (Dodson 1998, Ulicki and Crush 2002). Women are replacing men as the foreign employees of choice in some low-wage sectors of the South African economy such as agriculture. But women are also now migrating temporarily for a broad range of social, productive and reproductive reasons (Dodson 1998). Women from elsewhere on the African continent do not yet appear to be a major component of the migrant stream, but this is likely to quickly change as familial, transport and other facilitating connections develop with male migrants from these countries.
- 2.7 The fall of apartheid has inserted South Africa into regional and trans-continental informal trade networks. There has been a very visible expansion of foreign hawkers and traders on South Africa’s streets not only from the SADC well beyond (Peberdy and Rogerson 2002). The pace at which these trading dynamics have changed is evident from an edited collection on the informal economy in South Africa published in 1990 (Preston-Whyte and Rogerson 1990). In this comprehensive overview of the informal economy in the last days of apartheid, not a single reference is made to migrants or immigrants of any kind. In other words, the informal economy has gone from a largely domestic affair in the 1980s to a truly transnational enterprise in the 1990s. In some places, the non-South African population has become almost entirely reliant on informal sector activity.
- 2.8 Then there is the new dynamic of unauthorized migration into South Africa. This form of migration has always been part of the landscape in South Africa, but the scope and scale of these movements and the source countries of the migrants appear to have changed significantly in the 1990s. The bulk of undocumented migrants are from neighbouring countries (especially Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Malawi) but these unauthorized migrations are increasingly from the rest of Africa, Asia, Europe and North America. In January 1999, there were an estimated 850 000 overstayers still in the country alone, with an official government estimate of between 2.5 and 4.1 million “illegal aliens” in the country at any one time (RSA 1999). Such “official” estimates are based on highly suspect research and the actual number of unauthorized immigrants is likely much lower – perhaps as low as 500,000 (Reitzes 1998; Crush 1999b). Moreover, SAMP research has demonstrated that the vast majority of people from neighbouring

- countries who have visited South Africa in the past, as well as those who are currently in the country, entered legally through official border posts with the necessary documentation (McDonald et al 1998, 1999).
- 2.9 The 1990s have also witnessed the emergence of South Africa as a new destination for refugees fleeing political and cultural persecution, particularly from elsewhere in Africa. This new movement was presaged by the mass flight of Mozambicans in the 1980s. An estimated 350,000 refugees entered South Africa and less than 20 per cent have since returned (de Jongh 1994). South Africa's distinctive post-apartheid migration relationship with Mozambique was forged during this period and has intensified and diversified since. This complex relationship is glossed over in official discourse which makes no distinction between the different forms of migration to South Africa – “illegal aliens” are all the same and deserving of the same draconian policy response (RSA 1999).
- 2.10 Finally, there is the critical question of the degree of permanence of the new migrants. Historically, cross-border migration was characterized by impermanence. The assumption of the post-apartheid South African state is that most entrants are permanent immigrants not temporary migrants. The state has therefore adopted a battery of measures to try and ensure that they remain temporary (Minnaar and Hough 1996; Johnston and Simbine 1998; Human Rights Watch 1998; SAHRC 1999; RSA 1999). Immigration is at an all-time low; mass arrests and deportations have sent over 600,000 migrants home since 1994; and migrants are precluded from access to low-cost housing subsidies (Crush 1999a, b; McDonald 1999). Most African migrants — from panhandlers to professors — are feeling the verbal, and sometimes physical, sting of rampant anti-foreign sentiment (Morris 1998; Human Rights Watch 1998; McDonald et al 1998, 1999; SAHRC 1999). These conditions are hardly likely to encourage permanence or integration, as the government well knows (RSA 1999).
- 2.11 SAMP's national surveys of regional source countries suggest that there is nothing for the state to worry about (McDonald 2000). Few migrants express interest in long-term permanent residence and South African citizenship. Across a wide range of indicators, migrants strongly prefer life in their home countries. Visits to South Africa are generally strategic and temporary. More detailed sectoral studies of migrant miners, construction workers and farmworkers confirm the temporariness of much contemporary migration (Sechaba Consultants 1997; de Vletter 1998; Rogerson 1999; Crush et al 1999; Crush et al 2000). The national surveys do, however, reveal differences between African migrants already within South Africa and those interviewed outside (McDonald et al 1999). Those within the country are generally more positive about life in South Africa and express much greater interest in taking out permanent residence (53% v 19%). But the relative indifference of both sets of migrants to South African citizenship or to remaining in South Africa indefinitely is still striking.

- 2.12 The evidence suggests that the vast majority of Mozambican refugees from the civil war of the 1980s have integrated into South African society in significant ways.² Most of these “new South Africans” retain close material and other linkages to home areas in Mozambique and orient their lives around narratives of (eventual) return (Lubkemann 2002). These studies also raise the question of the importance of social networks and economic transactions in linking source and destination areas and in sustaining migrant in-flows. The links and networks are currently much denser for SADC migrants although this is rapidly changing.

3.0 Transnationalism and Migration

- 3.1 As the concept of “transnationalism” has only recently begun to be employed in migration studies in South Africa, a brief explanation of what is meant by the term is in order. Transnationalism, according to some of its more materially-grounded proponents (Portes et al 1999, 218), forms a “highly fragmented” area of study that “lacks both a well-defined theoretical framework and analytical rigour”. Different units of spatial analysis combined with “diverse levels of abstraction” make it difficult to label any one school of thought as representative of transnationalism. Moreover, the foundational notion of a back-and-forth movement of migrants between “host” and “home” country that underscores the transmigration thesis brings into question the validity of a new term to describe an age old practice.
- 3.2 Nevertheless, Portes and his colleagues argue that there are characteristics to transnationalism that are unique to the late 20th century and which demand a new analytical matrix. Accordingly, they argue for a delimitation of the definition of transnational migration to better capture its truly distinctive features. We use their definitions here as a guideline for how researchers might think constructively about the use of the term in South Africa. These are summarized below.
- 3.3 *Transnationalism represents a high intensity of exchanges on the part of migrants between the host and home country.* Glick Schiller and Fouron (1999, 344) define transnational migration as “a pattern of migration in which persons, although they move across international borders, settle and establish ongoing social relations in a new state, maintain ongoing social connections with the polity from which they originated.” Transnational migrants literally “live their lives across international borders.” Thus, transnationalism implies both immigration and settlement in the country of destination and the cultivation of strong backward linkages, what Glick Schiller et al (1995, 48) refer to as “simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society.” The occasional trip home, or the sporadic sending of remittances to family and friends, are not, in and of themselves, sufficient to justify the labeling of a new migration phenomenon. “What constitutes truly original phenomena”, write Portes et al (1999, 219), “are the high intensity of exchanges, the new modes of transacting, and the multiplication of activities that require cross-border travel and contacts on a sustainable basis”.

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- 3.4 *Transnational activities are tied into internationalization and globalization.* As the demand for cheap labour grows in the North, particularly in menial jobs in service sectors concentrated in large urban areas (Sassen 1988, 1991), there has been a dramatic expansion in the number of workers from the South making their way to economies in the North in hopes of finding work. And as affordable international transport and communications broaden their audience, it becomes easier for labour from the South to reach and learn about these job opportunities in the North (Castells 1996; Hannerz 1996). According to Portes et al (1999, 227), it is this “thick web of regular and instantaneous communication and travel that we encounter today” which differentiates “transnationalism” from the otherwise ad-hoc and less frequent back-and-forth movements of migrants in the past. In the same way that globalization (another term that can be meaningless if its parameters are not spelled out clearly) describes a new and fundamentally different set of characteristics for the international market economy of the late 20th century, transnationalism describes a new and fundamentally different set of international migration dynamics.
- 3.5 *Transnationalism is a new way of understanding and describing migrant identity(ies).* In direct contrast to the assimilation hypothesis which sees migrants as casting off the old and absorbing the new, transnational researchers argue that identity must be seen as one of hybridity where migrants take on a multiplicity of identities that are a combination of home and host. The primary determinants of these identities and their degree of fluidity is a point much debated in the transnational literature (Bhabha 1990; Glick Schiller et al 1992; Rouse 1992; Bondi 1993; Basch et al 1994; Mitchell 1997; Smith and Guarzino 1998) but there is a general agreement that for “immigrants involved in transnational activities...success does not depend so much on abandoning their culture and language to embrace another society as on preserving their original cultural endowment, while adapting instrumentally to a second” (Portes et al 1999, 229).
- 3.6 *The cumulative theory of transnational migration suggests that migration is an iterative process that becomes increasingly independent of the conditions that originally caused it.* The process “builds upon a growing base of knowledge, experience, social contacts, and other forms of social and cultural capital in self-reinforcing fashion” (Massey et al 1994). While their model has an air of inevitability, its value lies in the questions it raises about the role of social networks and cross-border linkages in precipitating, reinforcing and entrenching transnational migration and eventually integration. One of the consistent failings of the South African migration literature is its failure to examine the entire migratory nexus. The transnationalism perspective, with its focus on networks and linkages, stands as an important corrective (Rogers and Vertovec 1995; Portes 1996; Smith and Guarzino 1998; Itzigsohn et al 1999; Roberts et al 1999; Popkin 1999). Glick Shiller and Fouron (1999, 344) usefully advance the concept of “transnational social fields” to describe the whole terrain of interlocking transnational relationships and networks.

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- 3.7 *The sheer size and diversity of migrant communities, and new technologies of communication and transportation offer new modes of resistance to exploitation and discrimination for migrants.* Support networks in the home and host country, international non-governmental organizations lobbying for migrant rights, legal and contraband informal trade – all of these are common and widespread activities which provide an avenue for migrants to challenge the asymmetries of power in the global marketplace (Smith et al 1997; Cohen 1998). It should be noted, however, “that the parallels between economic transnationalism from above, as sponsored by multinational corporations, and its grass-roots counterparts, are only partial” (Portes et al. 1999, 230). While not wanting to deny agency on the part of migrants and migrant communities to determine their own future, one must be careful not to overstate the potential for autonomy in a global capitalist system.
- 3.8 The recent South African experience appears to both support and challenge the framework described here. Support can be found first and foremost in the proposition that the expansion and liberalization of capitalism has led to an intensification of cross-border migration in the region. The deepening search for cheap(er) labour evident in the use of female farmworkers from Lesotho (Ulicki and Crush, 2002), the relatively recent emergence of Durban as a major destination point for work-seekers from other countries in Africa (Maharaj and Moodley, 2002) and the new trade opportunities (legal and otherwise) opening up for foreign entrepreneurs from neighbouring countries (Peberdy and Rogerson, 2002) all point to the “thickening” of the socio-economic web of relations that undergird transnationalism.
- 3.9 The fixedness of new migrants in South Africa, a theoretical prerequisite for the application of concepts of transnationalism and transnational social fields, is less established. Much cross-border migration continues to mimic in form, though not volume, the established pattern of temporary migrant movements. While South African immigration policy remains so restrictive and public sentiment so brutish, more permanent settlement must be essentially clandestine. There are signs, however, of greater permanence emerging in selected areas and amongst certain populations, particularly but not exclusively Mozambicans. Lubkemann (2002), Reitzes and Bam (2002), and Maharaj and Moodley (2002) demonstrate the clear emergence of transnational migration and a true transnational social field. Other studies hint at similar developments in other migrant spaces (Bouillon 1996; Morris 1999; Sinclair 1999). Research on the emergence of transnational social fields in South Africa is still very much in its infancy, however.
- 3.10 The transnationalist notion of hybrid identities is most strongly supported by Lubkemann (2002), although a more locally grounded identity appears to trump any loyalty to the Mozambican nation-state. The migrants he interviewed construct complex multiple identities that draw on the moral compass of their home district of Machaze to justify their “Machazianness.” At the same time, they are reconfigured to situate themselves as South African “citizens” and husbands and to absolve themselves of the pressures to

- return home. The size of the Machazian community in South Africa allows them to simultaneously create networks of support that serve to protect themselves from their “foreignness” in a country that is largely hostile to immigrants and immigration.
- 3.11 Despite these provocative findings, one must still ask just how novel the transnational migration perspective is in South Africa. With over a century of intense cross-border migration that has been dependent on the expansion of industrial and agricultural capital, a rich and long-standing literature on migrant identities, and a tradition of highly ethnographic as well as structuralist research into the dynamics of migration, it is not difficult to imagine researchers doing work on migration in Southern Africa questioning what is new in transnationalism.³
- 3.12 One can also question transnationalism as a vehicle for resistance. There are networks of migrants with strong links back home and there is institutional support in South Africa through unions and non-governmental organizations, but these networks tend to either represent a relatively narrow constituency (e.g. mine workers), or they are very new and poorly funded (e.g. the Cape Town Refugee Forum). These are not unimportant organizations for migrants, and they are likely to grow in importance in the future, but their current role in protecting and expanding the rights of migrants is very limited.
- 3.13 No doubt part of the problem here is the very poverty that has brought so many migrants to South Africa in the first place. As Portes et al (1999, 224) argue, it is access to “space- and time-compressing technology” like phones, faxes, airplanes and email that makes transnational resistance and mobilization possible and most effective. Those migrant groups with “superior access” to these infrastructures will be more successful in defending and promoting their rights. With the majority of African migrants living in poverty or near-poverty conditions where running water, let alone fibre optic cable, is the primary infrastructure concern (McDonald et al 1999), sophisticated transnational resistance networks will take some time to develop in South Africa. Even with the assistance of international organizations like the UNHCR, which has an office in Pretoria, local groups that represent migrants/refugees have made very little progress in their efforts to combat xenophobia in the country.
- 3.14 Despite these reservations, we ally ourselves broadly with the transnationalism thesis – particularly the stream that takes questions of materiality seriously. As Nononi and Ong (quoted in Vertovec 1999, 456) argue, there is a danger of a creeping dilution of migration research by a cultural studies approach “that treats transnationalism as a set of abstracted, dematerialized cultural flows, giving scant attention either to the concrete, everyday changes in people’s lives or to the structural reconfiguration that accompany global capitalism.” Transnationalism that engages in both the local and the global, the psychological and the structural, the personal and the institutional, can contribute enormously to our understanding of the forces that drive and shape cross-border migration as well as help researchers to engage, in turn, in the “real” world of migration

politics, resistance and change. Transnationalism helps us to delineate a series of useful research questions and offers theoretical insights into what the findings might mean.

- 3.15 There is, however, one final caveat with respect to the thesis. As the theoretical literature on transnational migration expands and becomes more sophisticated, it is not always accompanied by, or backed up by, empirical research. As Vertovec (1999, 456) points out, “there is immediate need for more, in-depth comparative empirical studies of transnational human mobility, communication, social ties, channels and flows of money, commodities, information and images”. Without these empirical studies, transmigration remains little more than an elegant theory.

4.0 New Migrant Spaces

- 4.1 Methodologically, Portes et al (1999, 220) state their preference for the “individual and his/her support networks as the proper unit of analysis” in transnational migration studies. They also acknowledge the need for multiple scales of enquiry including institutional and corporate actors on a national and international level, and the importance of understanding their interdependence. However, the individual remains central to their analysis because of the importance of identity and the insights gleaned from interviews with individual actors about the institutions, networks and enterprises that make their own transnationalisms possible.
- 4.2 The personal narratives of migrants are essential to understanding the broader institutional, legislative and politico-economic questions of migration. However, it is also true that these would be empty narratives without the skin and bone of the larger social, economic and political systems within which they are articulated.
- 4.3 What about intermediary units of analysis such as “household” and “community”? The latter is central to the international literature on transnationalism, although it remains curiously under-theorized. In many analyses it appears to be nothing more than a vague descriptive shorthand for an ethnic or spatial agglomeration of immigrants (“immigrant communities”), the source area from which migrants originate (“home communities”), and the bundle of transnational activities and flows that link the two (“transnational communities”). Roberts et al (1999, 238) define the latter as “groupings of immigrants who participate on a routine basis in a field of relationships, practices, and norms that include both places of origin and places of destination.” Robin Cohen (1998, 6), who is similarly troubled by the lack of analytical precision, suggests that communities are what migrants (not researchers) make of them. Inverting Benedict Anderson, he notes that communities (not just nations) “are imagined.”
- 4.4 The question from the transnational literature, therefore, is whether the idea of “community” has any analytical value other than as something imagined from within. Our own feeling is that it does not; not only because of its conceptual woolliness but because it suggests a kind of insularity that diverts attention away from the intimate

patterns of daily social and economic interaction with citizens and host institutions that preoccupy most migrants. Community may be an imagined identity, defence or quest for autonomy; it is not an objective reality that analytically encapsulates migrants from the society of destination.

- 4.5 At an analytical level, two alternative concepts seem more useful: “the transnational household” and “transnational migrant spaces.” There is a long-established ethnographic and historical tradition in Southern Africa which defines “the household” as the most appropriate intermediary unit of migration analysis (Spiegel 1995; Murray 1987). The concept is certainly not unproblematical but retains its value for understanding the reconfiguration of cross-border migration within Southern Africa in the 1990s. What is equally clear, however, is that the ‘traditional’ concept of the household in the migration literature as a spatially-bounded, rural unit with an entrenched gendered division of labour (males go, females stay) is increasingly redundant. New household forms and types of internal and cross-border rural-urban linkage were clearly evident by the 1980s and have intensified since the final collapse of influx controls (Moore 1994; Spiegel et al 1996; Spiegel and Mehlwana 1997).
- 4.6 The household remains a critical unit of analysis in the study of contemporary South African migration, but there is a need for a flexible and dynamic concept of the household. The general shifts in SADC migration patterns in the 1990s are strongly correlated with changes in household structure, composition and geography. The intensification of new streams of women’s migration are best explained through what Dodson (1998) calls a “household strategy” approach. Ulicki and Crush (2002) show that in Lesotho declining opportunities for male migration to South Africa are precipitating a redefinition of household gender roles and a compensating upsurge in women’s migration. Lubkemann (2002) identifies the emergence, within the Mozambican migration nexus, of new multiple-sited households coordinated by the polygynous “life strategies” of male migrants. Whether this is a peculiar product of the Machaze district’s particularly disruptive civil war experience, or a more general phenomenon, remains to be explored. However, transnational polygyny is clearing creating a new form of migrant household in South Africa.
- 4.7 Rather than speaking of “migrant communities”, we propose an alternative focus on new and old “migrant spaces”, on the demographic, social and cultural contents of those spaces and their economic and political linkages with the source regions, the host society, and its citizens and institutions. The quintessential migrant space in South Africa is the migrant compound or hostel (Minnaar 1993; Ramphele 1993; Crush 1994). These highly gendered spaces sought, not particularly successfully, to insulate migrants from their surrounds and to ensure, in the commitment to keeping migrants impermanent, that transnational spaces did not emerge. The early transnational spaces of South African urbanization included the slumyards and tin towns of major centres (Parnell 1988, 1989). The state fought a long battle to control and eradicate these spaces, refusing to admit defeat until as recently as 1986 (Lemon 1991). However, the “informal settlements”

that increasingly dot the post-apartheid city landscape are testimony to the growth and rapid reconfiguration of new migrant spaces in South Africa. They are also powerful testimony to the ability of migrants to inhabit, reshape and reinvent spaces prepared for other purposes.

- 4.8 The question, then, is how traditional migrant spaces are being remade and reconfigured by new cross-border migrants. Here we see various new tendencies. The environs of mine compounds are being transformed by new, often female, migrants from within and outside South Africa (Moodie 1995). The high intensity of interaction and linkage between some of these settlements and home countries is certainly suggestive of the emergence of a new transnational space. Similarly, informal settlements and “traditional townships” contain increasing agglomerations of migrants and refugees from neighbouring countries (and further afield) who retain transnational linkages. This is clearly evident in the Vaal townships (Lubkemann 2002) and in parts of greater Cape Town (Dodson and Oelofse 2002). Highly mobile traders and entrepreneurs are also creating newly visible, but highly fragmented, transnational spaces in city centres and markets (Peberdy and Rogerson 2002). Elsewhere, apartheid’s rural slums are host to growing numbers of cross-border migrants. Within cities such as Johannesburg, formerly “white” areas such as Yeoville and Hillbrow, are being actively transnationalized by new migrants from East and West Africa (Morris 1998, 1999).
- 4.9 The singular most important feature of the emerging transnational “migrant spaces” in South Africa (which does not attach to the idea of transnational “communities”) is that these spaces are co-inhabited and shared with citizens. They are the localities of most direct and intense interface with South Africans. It is here, at the “shack face”, that the real substance of relationships between citizens and non-citizens is forged. Dodson and Oelofse (2002), for example, show that the large foreign migrant population of Mizamoyethu near Cape Town find themselves in a triangular relationship with new migrants from other parts of South Africa, and the more established (South African) residents of the community. The subject of analysis is not (as it might be elsewhere) the relationship between settled citizen and upstart immigrant. What we are essentially dealing with here are relations between two migrant streams – one domestic and the other transnational – with similar behaviours and expectations but contrasting access to rights and resources. The question is how the common experience of migrancy conditions and shapes the patterns of interaction between local and transnational migrants.
- 4.10 A similar scenario emerges at Marconi Beam, but this time with migrants – foreign and national – who arrived in the settlement at approximately the same time, with both groups having a claim of sorts to space in which they live (McDonald 2002). The stakes are raised in this particular case with the building of a new (subsidized) housing development for the residents. Who gets access to these houses – and, indeed, who is privy to information about access – is determined in part by nationality, differentiating those who would be able to become a member of the new community from those “left out in the cold”.

- 4.11 Another twist on this local interface can be seen in Winterveld, near Pretoria (Reitzes and Bam 2002). Here, the foreign population had been resident since the founding of the area, and had been living harmoniously with South Africans (mostly Africans forcibly relocated during apartheid) for over two decades. But with the fall of apartheid in the early 1990s, and the rush for more secure livelihoods and resources, an otherwise dormant “insider/outsider” tension has emerged, with South African identity becoming the key criterion for access to these livelihoods and resources.
- 4.12 These case studies provide the most fine-grained account of the interactions between citizens and non-citizens in South Africa available to date and help us to understand how these interactions shape the spaces in which migrants can (or cannot) become active and accepted participants in South African civil society (see also Lohnert et al 1998). One of the more troubling aspects of the South African government’s 1999 White Paper on International Migration is its effort to arrest and prevent any such process by pitting South Africans against foreigners within old and emergent migrant spaces (RSA 1999). The central proposal is that the ‘policing’ (i.e. identification and expulsion) of undocumented migrants should be devolved to the local or “community level.” The state would turn ordinary South Africans into snoops and informers on their neighbours. As its critics point out, a clearer recipe for official sanctioning of xenophobic action would be hard to imagine (Williams 1999). This set of proposals, now enshrined in the Immigration Act 2002, spells the death of any chance that South Africans and non-citizens in concert might indeed “invent” and “imagine” new communities of mutual tolerance and interaction.
- 4.13 These studies also reveal the important differences between insiders/outsiders and the need to understand the great variety of local migration dynamics when considering the more monolithic questions of national policy making. Addressing issues of xenophobia, as the South African government argues it would like to do (RSA 1999), requires a multi-faceted approach to education and poverty alleviation that is cognizant of the new and changing migrant spaces emerging in the country. “South Africanness” is not just a question of citizenship or official documentation. It is also about contests over the more concrete (and often mundane) daily requirements of life, and the territoriality and space that accompanies them.

ENDNOTES

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² The results of the recent amnesty for undocumented migrants who entered South Africa before 1991 are instructive (Crush and Williams 1999). As many as 146,000 (73%) of the applications for permanent residence were from Mozambicans and only 54,000 from all other SADC countries combined.

³ This literature includes van Onselen (1976), Murray (1982), Jeeves (1985), Crush et al (1991), Chirwa (1992), Moodie (1994), Coplan (1994), Harries (1994), Cockerton (1995).

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